

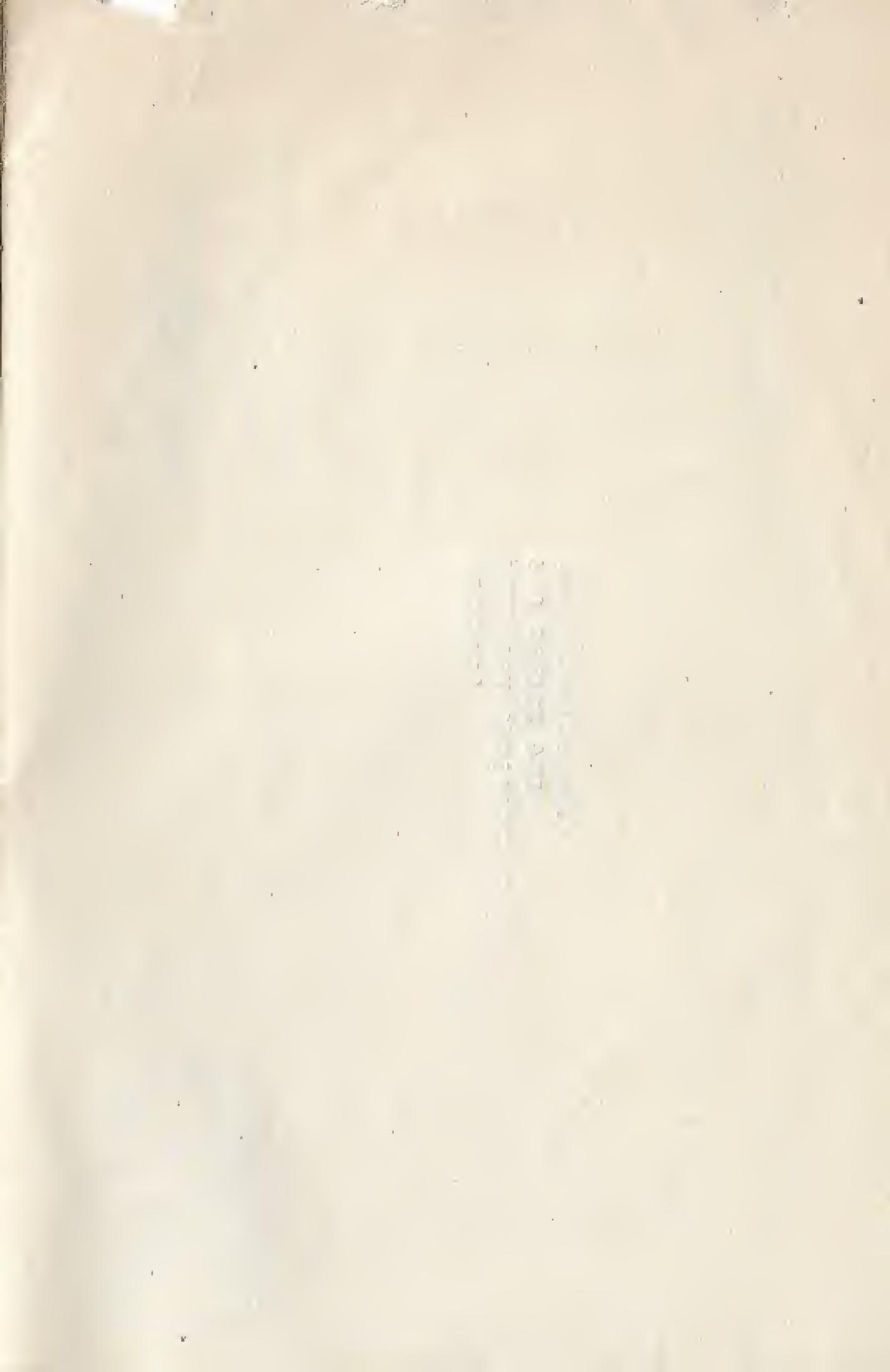
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ELDERS,

Their Work and Qualifications

By E. R. Harper



ELDERS, THEIR WORK AND QUALIFICATIONS

October 20, 1950, 11 A.M.

E. R. Harper

Article 1

Brother Young, The Broadway church, Elders and Deacons, of the congregation, fellow gospel preachers, members of the body of Christ, and friends of ours who have gathered here this morning to be with us upon this great occasion, greetings and best wishes to you from the Highland congregation of Abilene, Texas. Let me express to you my appreciation for this wonderful progress you have made in the Master's work in such few years of service. It did my heart good when I read that Brother Sanders, who delivered the first sermon and who did the first local work in Lubbock was invited by you to preach the last sermon in the old Broadway church building and to be respected after all these years by you who have known him from your beginning. I know his heart rejoices today as well as yours and may he continue to enjoy such fellowship and love from you, his brethren, with whom he has so faithfully laboured through the days and years when the work was hard. May those of us who are some younger and who have inherited the works and foundations of others ever be humbly thankful for their sacrifice and never seek to rob them of their rightful place in the great work of the church of our Lord. They have paved the way, built the roads, fought the battles, won the victories, and have given to us a church ready for a greater work. They soon will lay aside their battle scarred armours and join the teeming millions of the centuries past to await the glorious resurrection of the dead to go marching home to that "inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith ready to be revealed in that day." May we upon whom this great task has now fallen be faithful to such trust.

My Subject

I have been assigned the subject of the Elders, Their Work and Qualifications, at least that is what it amounts to, when discussed as it should be. No more difficult subject could have been assigned to your speaker than is this one. I begin its discussion with "fear and trembling" for I know that the future of the church is centered around the proper function of the elders of the church. Had it not been so, God would have used some other method of leadership in the church of his Son. To be an elder is one of the most difficult tasks assigned to any man. I do not "crave" the position and yet I know it is the

greatest honor that can be bestowed upon mortal man, to honestly be qualified to serve the house of the Lord as a faithful steward-bishop, elder of the glorious body of our Lord. I respect the elders of the church and I sympathize with them in the work they are called upon to do.

The elders here are just men and I do not come this morning with such praise of them and their foresight, that would make it appear that they are men above mistakes or men greater in vision and zeal than many other faithful elders in other congregations of our Lord; but I do not want to thank them and commend them for their love for the truth; their zeal for the truth; their wonderful vision in the great field of labour for our Lord; and their accomplishments so wonderfully achieved in so short a time, in your good city of Lubbock. Your building is beautiful, yet not sinfully extravagant; it is equipped for a wonderful work in the affairs of the Lord and may we keep it only for his work and be humbly thankful to him for his wonderful providence in blessing us with such a country as the U. S. of America where we can preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and erect buildings adequate to meet our needs.

I suppose I happen to be one of that number who believe in congregations large enough in a city or even in the country, to do things and to make the religious world to know we are fighting for the church of our Lord to take its rightful place in the hearts of men and that we are able at last to send the gospel of Christ to the nations of the earth. This great work has been given its momentum by the congregations that have grown in vision, that have grown in zeal; that have grown in spirituality, that have grown in numbers; and that have been able by all this to have money enough to launch the greatest mission work since Paul preached to the world, the gospel of Christ, in the first century. Of course we must all watch and be sure that our great work of evangelization both at home and abroad is kept from danger and planned after the teaching of God's word and then in Christian cooperation see that the world is given the truth.

God's Plan For His Church

That this great work may be carried out, Christ organized the local congregation and set over its affairs elders that they might form the policies of the work in keeping with God's instructions; the deacons to serve the church under the elders, not over them; teachers and preachers to assist in their respective fields and the great body of the church to follow and join in the great program of work outlined by faithful and competent elders. Each of these is to respect the other and all are to function as the various organs of our bodies function, that the body of Christ may be kept a healthy, vigorous, working organism. Much teaching needs to be done just here to see

that each one understands his respective duties and functions and that each one respects his duties and functions and the duties and functions of the other. We can't all be "eyes," if so, where would the "hearing be"?

Here Is the Importance of Qualified Elders

If the above is to be done it is going to be because of qualified elders. We often speak of the "work, or duties of elders" and their "qualifications" as though they are two entirely separate things. It would seem to me that in the qualifications of elders we have set forth their duties. Hence I now enter the field of "Qualified Elders." Not much teaching is done here due to the fact the "elders" in many places can't do the teaching for they do not know how, and next, if the preacher does it he is usually asked to leave, sooner or later. I know you are ready to say, "You are wrong, Brother Harper." Our preacher has preached on the subject and no one was offended. I hope that shall be the way of it here and by the above statements I do not mean to cast unkind reflections upon anyone, for, I myself, am a preacher of the gospel. I know what we come up against and I know the fear of such a thing. Any time an elder gets it in for a preacher, though he be as good as the "martyred saints," he has to go. Hence we enter such with great caution. It is much easier to say to a preacher, "I would preach the truth no matter what they think" than it is for you to stand there when your entire future and that of the peace of the congregation are at stake and preach a sermon that will "unseat" men who are elders if they believe and obey the word of the Lord. But because I have always possessed to some degree, that disposition to preach my convictions, regardless, if, and when, I am called upon, I have been caused to suffer no little in the body of Christ.

Terms by Which They Are Called

Elders: When we study the terms by which they are called in the Bible we get a glimpse of the duties and qualifications. In Acts 20:17 Paul "called the elders together." In Acts 14:23 they "appointed elders in every city" and in Acts 15:6 the "apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." Now the word "elder" simply means an older man. This eliminates boys and young men from being elders. They were men who had reached such age that they had wisdom, judgment, experience, and with prudence could know how to exercise good sense in the affairs of the church. It also carried with it the idea of "age and experience" in spirituality, devotion and consecration in the work and worship of the Lord. This must not be overlooked as so many times the church does in the selection of elders to lead them. In the Old Testament the "elders" of Israel were the older men, men rich in experience, service and devotion to God. They had upon their shoulders the responsibility of leading the children of Israel. So it is in the New Testament.

Hence this word regulates the age of men who can serve as elders, both as to years and experience in the service and worship of the Lord.

Pastor: The term Pastor is found in Eph. 4:11 where Paul says, "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Here is the term pastor referring to the same group of men, the elders. It has the same meaning and use as the word "shepherd." Hence the pastor is the "shepherd" of God's people. In John 10 we have the great example of what it means to be a shepherd and not a "hireling." Christ "knew his sheep." How can you be a good shepherd if you know not the "sheep under you"? Many "pastors," elders of the church do not so much as know who comes to the congregation where they are "pastors." How then can he "know his sheep"?

2. Christ "leads" his sheep, he did not "whip them" nor did he "drive them." He led them—he went before them. He set the example they were to follow.

3. Christ "fed" his sheep. He said "I am the door; by me if any man enter, he shall be saved and shall go in and out, and find pasture." It was his duty to see they were properly fed. This, a good shepherd, will also do in the church.

4. Christ "tended" his flock in every sense of the word. He "nurtured" them. In John 10:10 Christ said "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." In this he gave protection to them day and night. He watched for them and hence he says in verse 11 "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. But he that is an hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep." Then in verse 15 he says "I lay down my life for my sheep." This, my friends, is what the Lord had in mind when he "gave some pastors, shepherds." He intended for his sheep to be cared for and not to be left to starve and be destroyed by the wolves. There is food for prayerful meditation here upon the part of all elders-pastors-shepherds of God's children. To be otherwise as described here is to be an hireling. And O, How God despised an hireling, if John 10 can express God's feelings for such!

Bishop: The word bishop is another distinguishing title for the same group of men. In 1 Tim. 3:1 Paul says "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." This word means an "overseer," one who looks after the affairs of another. The "elders" are made the "overseers" of the flock of God, hence the "bishops" of the church. There is no higher order of leadership among the people of God, than the "elders," the "pastors," which are also the "bishops" of

the church, which are also referred to as the "presbyters" of the church, all referring to the same group of men each expressing a little different kind of responsibility imposed upon them. As the "bishops" of the church they are,

1. The overseers of the church and all are under their directions. The deacons have no right to sit in the "policy making" meetings of the church and "vote" with the elders of the church. They have no power, no authority only as it is "delegated" to them by the elders of the church, just as the elders have no power only that which is delegated to them by the Holy Spirit. So certain as they continue to "vote" against the elders of the church they will sooner or later, bring down to sorrow the high and exalted position of the bishops of the church, as the "overseers" of God's people. Just give it time to work and such a practice will eventually foment trouble. The bishops are the "overseers" of God's work, assisted by the deacons and all members of the body of Christ.

This is why I said that too many times preaching on such matters will cause trouble, for, if it is carried out as it should be, such practice as above would be discontinued, but when it is, in many places, where deacons try to run the affairs of the church and where designing elders try to "stack" the "odds" against the majority of the elders the preacher is fired and the church split wide open and the blame put on the preacher. When there is known trouble in the congregation, the elders do wrong and sin to bring a good man into such before they settle their own troubles and cause, by such negligence, the hurt, if not the ruin, of good preachers. You need to have the courage to do your own "overseeing" and straightening out of the troubles of the church. If you can't do it then you are not qualified to serve in such a capacity and this again brings on trouble for men do not want to resign no matter how far they fail in their duties as elders, bishops, who are to oversee the church.

Paul said in Acts 20:28: "Take heed unto yourselves and unto the flock over which the Holy Spirit made you overseers to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood." When you make this investigation of self and see that you do not qualify to a degree great enough to function as here commanded, then you should resign or at once qualify for the duties enjoined upon you. Here is where the tragedy of the church lies today; here is where we find the "casualties" among God's local congregations.

2. They are "stewards" of God, Paul says in Titus 1:7: "For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God." A steward is one entrusted with the care and oversight of another's property. What grave responsibility—this being a steward of God!

3. They are also "watchmen" in the house of the Lord. Paul

said to the elders at Ephesus: "Watch and remember" (Acts 20:31) for there would come "wolves" and "from among themselves men would arise" not "sparing the flock" and "drawing men away after them." Hence, you are the "watchmen" on the walls of Zion. Paul in Heb. 13:17 says: "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves to them: For they watch over your souls, as they that must give account that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."

Yes, the "elders" of the church are "watchmen," watching for the souls of the church. This means that they have more to do than to "watch" the assembly, than to watch the spending of the money, the hiring and firing of the preacher, the keeping up of the building; they are to "watch for your soul."

They have the right to "spy into your private actions" if they think it is wrong. They have a right to know what you do and where you go and what you say for they watch for your souls that the may give account of you with joy. The shepherd gives account of his sheep. He is to know if they are sick, if they are undernourished, if they are out of the fold, if they have strayed away, if they are in other pastures, if they are running with the wrong flock. He is to "know his sheep and where they are and what they are doing" else he is a hireling. Tell me there is nothing for an elder to do! No the elders of the church in most places are not beginning to function as true shepherds, as true watchmen. They do not even "know their sheep" much less "watch for their souls."

The Duty of the Church

This implies something else, namely that the "flock," the church, is to follow their instructions that it may be well with the church as well as the elders. Congregations also need to learn that they must respect the elders and their leadership or they too will be condemned. Each has a responsibility to the other. Members of the church, do not forget this on your part. You can't just rebel against the elders just because you do not like something that is being done or because you want it done another way. So long as they lead scripturally you are to follow and the deacons are to serve. Yes, "elders," you are to be the "watchmen" on the walls of Zion. It is time to begin. The hour is here; in fact the hour is now late.

4. They are also the "rulers" of God's people on earth. In Heb. 13:7 Paul says "Remember them that have the RULE over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Yes, they have "rule over God's people." But again Paul says in 1 Tim. 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."

Again we see that the elders are our spiritual rulers and we are to "esteem them with honor" when they rule well. Elders, if you expect such honor to be bestowed upon you remember it does not come just because you are acting as an elder or wear that "title"; it is due you only upon one condition, namely, that you "rule well" the house of God. If you fail to "rule well" you will suffer severe criticism and then you are often prone to criticize the congregation and quote this passage to them that the "elder is worthy of honor"; no it does not say that. It says "if he rules well" is he is worthy this honor. A world of difference if we leave out this qualifying clause.

Lording

Of course we understand they are not to rule as "lords over God's heritage" for Peter says in 1 Peter 5:2: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." This shows plainly that you are not "bosses" in the sense of a Stalin, or a Pope, that the church must bow to your every demand regardless; but you are to lead, to teach, to tend, to draw, to influence by your godly life and to cause them, from watching your sincere and humble life, to be happy to follow you and do the work of the church. Too often elders become "lords over God's people" and the church is never considered and the men of influence in the church, men of much ability, are shunned and even reprimanded for offering suggestions that might make more attractive the services of the Lord or might lift the vision of the church to greater things. He rules well who serves his people best. Even Christ said "I am not come to be ministered to but to minister." And "he that is greatest is the servant of all."

This brings us to a different phase of our lesson this morning. Having now seen the various functions of elders by having studied the terms by which they are called, we now approach the qualifications of such men who are to function as "elders," "pastors," "presbyters or rulers" of God's people. I am sure we are to understand, that, without the following qualifications men cannot fulfil such honored positions in the house of God. That they be able to lead the people of God in such great devotion, service of worship, and labour of love, Paul lays down the qualifications and we need not stumble here, more than at the plan of salvation by which man is saved from his sins. They are so definite that we can be certain of that which is best.

Desire the Office

Paul says in Tim. 3:1: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop he desireth a good work." Hence

man should "desire" this office but he must have more than just the desire. Let me say here that we should so train the youth of the church that they would so desire the office of a bishop that they will train themselves for this great work. A man should not be "hired" by promises and eulogies of greatness to accept this work against their will. He should not want the office "just to run the church." This should not be the "only" qualification he has. Again it says here, it is a "good work." The office of an elder is not just a place to vote "yes" for what you want and "no" for what you do not want. It is a place of work; hours, days, weeks and years and toil long into the night if need be. If not physically able to perform this duty you should not accept. It is work when done correctly.

Blameless

In verse 2, Paul says he must be "blameless." This does not mean that he can't make a mistake and that his judgment could not be wrong, but it does imply that he is to be a man who is morally fit; not dishonest, but dependable, upright in his dealings with his fellow man. This needs to be heeded carefully.

Husband of One Wife

Paul says he "must be the husband of one wife, one that ruleth well his own house." I recognize there is much disputing on this matter but it seems to me that the very context of this chapter and that of Titus 1, is too plain for quibbling as to an elder or bishop's being a married man with a family. If verse two were not of itself conclusive on this, and if the Greek admitted of such translation as some give under certain circumstances, verses 4-5 of this chapter and verse 6 of Titus 1, would forever show that its translation here is correct as to his having to be a married man with faithful, believing children. This is the "trial method" as given by Paul when he says Titus 1:6: "If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful, (believing) children," etc. Paul explains why this is, in 1 Tim. 3:5: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house how shall he take care of the church of God." This eliminates "old bachelors" from being elders; men without believing children serving as elders.

Novice

One who is old enough to have believing children, ruling well his own house with all gravity, having his own house in subjection to himself and to God would preclude all efforts to make a "young man," minus these qualifications, an elder of the church. A novice also eliminates those just "born into the kingdom of heaven"—just "recently members of the church." At least some 150 of the greatest scholars on earth in their translation of this chapter, dealing with their qualifications, thought

the original language was strongly in favor of such an idea and so translated it. I realize there may be men not married, men without children, without believing children who possess the qualifications of an elder, but usually they do not, and to eliminate all danger inspiration limited it to married men, with believing children. To select such can not be wrong and it is safe. Why not be safe? As the advertisement says, "Be not half safe —be safe."

Vigilant

This I have discussed under the elder's being a "watchman" in the walls of Zion." It is your duty to know what is going on, to be present at the services of the church, for remember the church is your obligation. A "hireling" will leave the "flock" to be destroyed by the wolves. A true shepherd will not.

Sober

Our next qualification is that of "soberness." It is somewhat an overlapping of "vigilant" but it is a much broader term. It includes so much that we have never comprehended and that is overlooked in the selection of "elders" to lead the people of God. I hope not to hurt any of your feelings but here I wish to impress upon your minds some fundamental facts. This word "sober" is not limited to just its relation to being "drunk" on intoxicating drinks; it comprehends the entire scope of man's actions as a leader in the church.

Barnes says "A man of sound mind; one who follows sound reasons, and who is not under control of passions. Perhaps the word prudent would come nearer to the meaning of the apostle." Clarke says "The etymology of the word is from two words, one meaning, "sound" and the other meaning "mind"; hence of a "sound mind," having a good understanding and complete government of his passions": "He should have a well cultivated mind, prudent and sedate." This, brethren, covers a lot that is lacking in so many men who have assumed the office of a bishop.

We can now see that this includes more than being free from drink and even more than just behaving one's self before men in his moral conduct. The definition of the word prudent, used by both Barnes and Clarke to describe the man who is "sober" will help us further to understand the qualifications of an elder. Webster says it means "capable of directing or conducting one's self wisely and judicially; morally or intellectually disciplined. Courteous, circumspect, or discreet, as in conduct, choice of ends or business management; not rash or ill-advised." This eliminates the man who can't make up his own mind, who is influenced by others, and who is always misunderstanding the meeting after having talked to his wife. This eliminates such men as those who "vote for a measure today" and then who

after having talked to the "click or to his wife" has to "vote" against on matters settled a month ago. If a man can't make up his mind without always taking it back, throwing the group into constant confusion, that man is not "sober," he is not "se-date," he is unqualified as an elder and should resign.

Good Behavior

Here is one that I embark upon with fear and trembling and yet it needs to be discussed thoroughly throughout the entire brotherhood for here is where we have so much criticism from the church and it is not unfounded criticism. The church is the greatest and most wonderful institution on earth and deserves to be held in dignity, Christian dignity of course, not worldly praises; but listen to the discussion of this term, good behavior.

This has to do with more than our conduct; such as lying, drinking, defrauding, etc.; it does include all such but it is much more far reaching in its regulations. Clarke says, of this word, it means "orderly, decent, grave, and correct in the whole of his appearance, carriage, and conduct. A clownish, rude, or boorish man should never have the rule of the church of God; the sour, the sullen, and the boisterous should never be invested with a dignity they would most infallibly disgrace." Here is why we tread softly the qualifications of elders of the church.

Barnes says: "Modest, mannerly—not sloven in his appearance or rough in his manner. He should be an example and pattern in all that goes to promote the welfare of mankind and there are few things so easily acquired that are fitted to do this, as refinement and gentle manners."

Brothers, this qualification of an elder should not be overlooked. This will vary with the locality in which we find ourselves. In the city, one who has served well a country congregation, might be a failure. In the country a man who has served well the church in the city may be worse than a failure. We may not like these things but have to face them and the Bible talks about them and we dare not be afraid to approach them. Your manner before an audience, your dress before a congregation may determine your leadership of them, all things else being met. I know a man who was preaching for a congregation at a certain place. They did not like his dress. He was a good man but not tidy in appearance, as they thought. They bought him a beautiful suit of clothes on Thursday, we say; on Friday and Saturday he wore the suit. Sunday when they expected him to be in the pulpit with this nice new suit, pressed, and presenting a neat and tidy appearance before the public, he came in without having had it pressed and had a day's growth of beard on his face; so they reported. Well he was a good man, he will go to heaven, but he will not return to this place and he can't reach the people like that. These things have to

be taken under consideration for the growth of the church is to be considered. Yes—"good behavior" covers a multitude of things. A man who is clean in life, careful in person, presents himself before an audience becomingly—not flashy, and presents a "dignity" befitting a servant of the Lord, is a man that is "orderly" or of "good behavior."

Hospitality

In the above qualification I believe would be included the idea of hospitality and yet it is mentioned separately. I am sure this is done that we give special emphasis to this great and marvelous trait that every Christian should have, and certainly an elder of the church.

Brother David Lipscomb said: "Entertaining strangers is frequently impressed as a Christian virtue in a high degree so he will be an example of the flock—teach by example as well as by precept."

Clarke says: "A Christian bishop, professing love of God and all mankind, preaching a religion, one half of the morality of which was included in, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' would naturally be sought by those who were in distress and destitute of friends, etc, etc." Of course it reaches far beyond the stranger; it takes in our neighbors and the entire church. To be an elder, brethren, is to do more than "vote" yes or no and "tell" the congregation "what they can and cannot do." It entails work, hospitality, good behavior, and a constant and abiding vigilance over all the affairs of the people of God. It means something to be an elder of the church of our Lord. But few men are trying to find out the qualifications and fewer are giving themselves to the mastery of their exalted position of honor in the house of the Lord.

No Brawler—Not a Striker—Contentious

Brawler:

The term "not given to much wine" is in the Revised Version, "no brawler." And it also says "not a striker." Further, "not contentious." These three terms are very much alike and overlap to such a degree I shall discuss them under the one head; no brawler.

Barnes says "he must be a peaceable, not a quarrelsome man." Clarke agrees as he says a brawler is "one who is abusive, insolent." Webster says it means: "noisy quarrel; loud, angry, contentious; wrangle, quarrel." No man like this is fit for an elder in the church, in fact is unfit for even a member in the family of the Lord unless he changes, God will remove him as a "spot or a blemish" when the church is presented to Christ.

Striker:

Of this word "striker" Brother Lipscomb says, "Ungoverned in temper, ready to fight." If you have an ungovernable temper you should not serve as an elder of the church. Clarke says: "Not quarrelsome; not ready to strike a person who may displease him; no persecutor of those who may differ from him." May I say that right here is where some serious thinking should be done and much prayer should be had. Here is where too much of our trouble comes. Often we can't differ without hating, without trying to persecute those who differ with us. Here is where our "politics" in the church begin and then by "fair or foul" means we set forth to get rid of an elder or a preacher or a deacon.

Brother Coleman Overby who has just passed on to join that immortal throng who awaits the resurrection of the dead that he might live eternally with Christ and the redeemed of the earth in the everlasting presence of God, whose funeral service I was invited to have part in and a man whom I loved with all my heart, had this to say concerning this word, "The striker in the church is a rebel." In other words he is against everything he did not suggest or for which he does not get the praise and the glory. He is one of these "Agin it" fellows.

Contentious:

Here is one of our most serious problems. Men who meet all other qualifications in a very fine way, yet they are contentious. They will not surrender to others, even in matters of judgment. They want their way. Brother Lipscomb has a very fine comment on this: "This does not mean that one is not to stand and contend for the truth, but many are ready to contend over unimportant matters. Such always live in torment and strife. Even truth and right should not be maintained in a contentious spirit." On this I could speak at length of experiences that are known to me. Men divided over "committees" through which the church may function; over officers they want or they do not want; over preachers they like or do not like; over certain men to serve in certain capacities just because they want their friends to do that and from here you may take it and add to it all the things you know about.

Certainly no man who is known to be a "contentious," "high-tempered," "brawler or striker" should ever be intrusted with the affairs of so sacred an institution as the body of our blessed Lord. If he is he should be removed after all means have failed to bring him to his senses.

Can This Be Done?

This brings up the issue, Can a man who is an elder ever cease to function as or be asked to resign as, an elder? Certainly

he can. If not then he might get drunk, become immoral, cease to attend the services of the Lord and still run the affairs of the church. This thing of "once an elder always an elder" is as foreign to the truth as "once saved always saved." When he ceases to have the qualifications of an elder; when he ceases to function as an elder, he may be disciplined the same as any other man. Being an elder does not make him immune from the discipline of the church. Paul said in 1 Tim. 5:19 "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses."

"Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear." If you can establish the truth of your accusations, you may deal with him the same as with any other and Paul said do it publicly that all may learn to fear.

Gentle:

The term "gentle" needs but little comment. To be "kind," and "understanding," easily approached, "meek, humble, and merciful" in all your dealings with the church and your friends, even your enemies. Forgiving, no "brawler, not easily offended" but patient with a heart full of love for the souls of men. A man like that is loved by all, yet he does not have to be without conviction. If it is an "affected gentleness or humility" that kind of man will stop at no limits to carry his point and he becomes a "martyr" before his time, that he may get his way. Beware of such. But when it is from the heart, motivated by a desire to be good and kind—yes, gentle to all—that man is a blessing to all who come in touch with him and the church is blessed by having him as an elder of the church.

Good Report:

This has been covered in the beginning of our lesson under the term "blameless." I quote Brother Lipscomb on this as we pass: "Moreover he must be of good report among them that are without lest he fall into the reproach and snare of the devil. He must so conduct himself as to have the respect and commendation of those without. The man who has the reputation for dishonesty and for love of money is not fit for an elder of the church of God." Brother J. W. Shepherd, at the close of a rather lengthy discussion on this point says, "For these weighty reasons Paul charged Timothy to be very careful when elders were chosen to choose only those who in their former days had preserved their good name stainless and their character unscarred.". This needs no further discussion. We know what this is. Men who have questionable reputations should resign. They keep the church in constant confusion. However such men seldom resign but ruin the church if asked to resign. They want the "offce" to lend "dignity" to their questionable conduct.

No Lover of Money

This needs to be emphasized for here is where many congregations are being held down in their work. Some men who are elders will not "turn loose" their money. They object to a building program; to a mission program; to an adequate teaching set-up; to gospel meetings, and many such things, all because it will cost to do such things. If the church accepts such responsibilities they will be forced to give or be "humiliated" for their "covetousness." Elders are to "lead the way." They may not be able to give much, but give as they have been prospered and then teach others to do the same. Tragic is the group of elders and deacons who have among their number that character who loves money instead of the Lord. He is disqualified and should resign. This does not mean the officers should jump at everything the preacher or congregation wants done and if they do not see fit to inaugurate his or their program, to be branded as "covetous," nor does it mean that you are to just spend the Lord's money without due and prayerful consideration; but it does mean that you are to be willing to "push" the work of the Lord scripturally and see that the church where you are "grows" in its strength and its devotion to the Lord. You must lead the way in everything.

Rule Well His Own House

Here I would love to dwell at length but I cannot. The man who is dominated by his wife has no place serving as an elder or deacon of the church. I would be ashamed to be known in the church as a man who had to ask my wife "how to vote" and when I go home she does not like what I have done, have to change it; I would not be humiliated so in the presence of men. I would resign. Usually women who so dominate their husbands will not let them resign. Do you not know you humiliate your husband before his fellow officers? Paul said in Eph. 5:22 and Col. 3:18, "Wives be in subjection to your own husbands." In 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 they are commanded to have their children in subjection. Now the reason for this is, Paul said, "for if a man know not how to rule his own house how can he take care of the church of God?" A man whose wife and children are not members of the church cannot qualify as an elder of the church. No little trouble in the church is because this one qualification is ignored and men are selected whose wives cause trouble and whose children are not faithful. When you try to lead and direct a people under such conditions they mock you and resent your trying to tell them how to live when your own family is in such a condition.

Apt To Teach

Now here is the final thought for this morning. Paul says they must be "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). In Titus 1:9 he says,

"holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." This is one of the outstanding qualifications of an elder. If he can't qualify here; if he can't teach and will not learn how to teach the word of the Lord faithfully, he does not qualify and should not accept a place of such grave responsibility.

I realize this word "apt" is a relative term, just as many of these others are and some possess them to a greater degree than others but every man to qualify as an elder must possess the ability to teach to a degree that the church can be edified, built up; the truth defended and the gainsayers put to flight. You know and I know that there are scores of men serving as elders of the church who do not know the Bible; who can't teach the word of the Lord; who can't put to flight the gainsayers; and if the defense of the truth were left to them the church would die. Such men, though good men, are not elders and should never have been selected and when selected had they been anything like qualified they would have known that such men cannot serve as an elder of the church.

Now all these other personal qualifications we have discussed and the having his family under control, are all to the effect that his teaching will not be hurt by such influences. If you can't teach and if you are not going to prepare to teach then you should not try to serve as an elder. If you can't teach publicly, you should at least be able to sit down with the members and with the lost and with the enemies of truth and teach them privately the way of the Lord knowing where in the word of the Lord these things are to be found. It is a fact that scores of elders never read, much less study, the Bible. Here is the tragedy of the church: Men serving as elders who are woefully lacking in the Bible qualifications to serve in such capacity.

Conclusion

Now in conclusion let me say that I respect the elders of the church. I have never been a party to the selection of elders where I work and neither have I ever been a party to a political scheme to rid the church of elders. I stand ready to defend this statement. I teach where I live just what I have here. I urge that all men selected be men who meet these qualifications. You may defy them for a while and move along very well but some day, down the line, trouble will come and the preacher will have to be the "scape goat" upon whose shoulders the entire mess will have to rest and all the church go free. That is not fair, much less Christian.

Important—Fundamental

Here I am saying a thing that I hope you will consider. The elders, if qualified, have the oversight of the church and its

affairs. They have the oversight of my soul and what I do. Every man, every member of the church should be under the oversight of some group of elders. I understand that there are times when the church is young, or when a person may move into a community where the churches are not and he has to build the church, where it has no elders. Under such circumstances he is to be subject to the general work and wishes of the congregation. Neither does this mean that a man living in a community where there is no congregation that he has to wait until he can get the right from some group of elders before preaching to his neighbors the gospel. But that congregation needs to teach and train men to become qualified elders and have them as the overseers of the congregation. I believe you will understand what I mean and that you will understand the questions that might be asked concerning isolated cases. Every preacher, be he local evangelist, giving "full time to evangelization" or what some term, "missionaries," asking support of the brotherhood for himself or the work that he is trying to develop, should be under the direction of and responsible to some local group of elders. This will save him much embarrassment at times and will give him the recommendation for his work that he needs. If the elders would function as they should, the trouble that is in the church, much of it, could be averted.

Attacking Others

Every man who speaks aught against his brother; who writes accusingly of his brother; who attacks another in the papers or from the pulpit, should submit such proof to the elders and then the man against whom such accusations have been made should be given an audience together with the elders where he is and these elders should not be prejudiced toward either of the men but only toward the truth. When the man who has made the accusations fails to present positive proof of his charges then the leaders where he is, should discipline him and if he does not correct his accusations, withdraw from him, and then all churches should respect such actions until such time that restitution has been made for the wrong inflicted upon an innocent man by this man who made the charge. If the accusations are true then all the congregation should stand behind the man who made them and demand that the guilty party make correction or be withdrawn from. Brethren, a lot of things that have gone on and shall continue to go on in the church would but function as they should. Elders should take the papers in the brotherhood and when the preacher where they live begins to assail some gospel preacher they need to call him in and ask for the proof. This thing of assailing a preacher or a church without proof should be stopped and the elders who do not so function will be found in the day of judgment as "hirelings" who let the sheep scatter and the church be wounded nigh unto death. These accusations should not be made upon "hearsay," The party assailed should

be consulted beforehand that truth and that alone be given. But remember if the accusations be true then said preacher, or member, or church should make corrections, but let the elders be sure that such are true before they are allowed to be published or spoken.

Their Jurisdiction

You may say they do not have jurisdiction over papers, schools, or evangelists in what they write, teach, or preach, but the Bible teaches plainly that they "watch over our souls for our good" and they have a right to discipline the individual who writes it, or who teaches it, or preaches it as an individual under their care. These individuals do not want to be withdrawn from.

No man is a "free-lance" in the kingdom of the Lord. That is why we have elders, bishops, pastors, stewards, watchmen. If "free-lance," why the "watchman"? Paul said in Acts 20:28 "watch and remember." The reason? "Wolves would enter; men would arise to draw away disciples after them." Paul said in Titus 1:10-11, "for there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially of the circumcision." No they were not all of the circumcision. They were the chief agitators but others were unruly and deceiving. Now whose duty is it to stop such? The elders? The next verse says "whose mouths must be stopped," etc. This he gave to the elders, the bishops of the church. We preachers are "under you" not "over you." When we get unruly it is your solemn duty to correct us and to restore peace to the church. If and when you who are elders begin to perform your duties as God has directed, you can control the papers; you can control the schools; you can control the worldliness in the church; you can save the church for first century Christianity by controlling the individuals who are under your watch, care and protection. It is time that all honest defenders of the truth are upheld and it is also time that all innocent men be defended and peace restored to the house of the Lord.

I stand ready to correct any false statement or charge I have ever made about any man if that man can prove I have so made it. I am willing to meet any man or group of men before the elders where I preach and the elders where he or they live, present our differences and be governed by their recommendations. Will you? If not, you are wrong. I stand ready to "practice what I preach."

I thank you and may God bless us and may the church that is now torn and bleeding be healed with the "Balm of Gilead" and peace and love, founded upon the eternal truth of God's word, be ours to enjoy.

But remember, this can only be done when elders, qualified, perform their duties and the church, properly taught, respects the instructions and decisions of the bishops of the church.

My time ran out and it became necessary for me to close before I had finished all that I had in mind to say, but this I should like to have go into this tract. I had it in mind, had time permitted.

In Jer. 23:1-4 the prophet had this to say to the "elders" of Israel: "Woë be unto the pastors-shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors-shepherds that feed my people; ye have scattered my flock and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord—And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord."

We may be ready to say this is in the Old Testament and therefore we do not have to fear such in the church today, but remember the admonition of Paul to the church in Corinth, chapter 10:11, 12, "Now all these things happened to them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We are to be "admonished" by the things in the Old Testament. Let him ponder well these admonitions who thinks to disobey the voice of the Lord as a shepherd over the church of the Lord today. Let him who fails to "feed" the sheep; who would fail to "visit" the flock and by such carelessness let them be "scattered and driven away," take heed lest he also meet the same fate as the eldrs of Jer. 23:1-4. God said "I will visit upon you the evils of your doings." Therefore to fail to feed the flock; to fail to visit the people of God, and by such allow them to be destroyed is called here by the prophet "the evils of your doings." Paul said in Heb. 2:1-3, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."

Think you that God will overlook so serious a matter as elders failing in their duty to "feed," "oversee," and "tend" the church of the Lord? Think you that the Lord will let elders, bishops, go free and not punish them for their failure to obey his instructions as the "rulers" over his people? What think you is the meaning of the Lord's warnings in John 10 concerning the "hireling" who flees and leaves the sheep to be destroyed by the wolves? Fail in your solemn duty as an elder; allow the church to suffer and the sheep to be scattered; have no more care for them nor interest in them that you do not visit them, tend them, care for them, protect them, save them from destruction and starvation, and you may rest assured of the truth of Jer. 23:1-4, that God

will bring down upon you "all the evils of your doings." Remember "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward" back there and Paul asks us "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" today? There will be no escape. Elders must answer before God in the day of judgment for their failures to qualify as elders and then to carry out the work of the "bishops of the Lord over his church." Woe be unto the hirelings over the sheep!

God's Blessing to the Bishops

Now to those bishops, elders, who are not "hirelings" but true "shepherds" over God's "heritage" there is a reward promised for you. Your trials may be many and hard to bear in dealing with us, the people of the Lord, but if you will with patience endure it to the end and safely present your flocks in the day of all days, before the judgment seat of Christ, then Peter says in 1 Peter 5:1-10, "And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

This, to you elders who have striven hard to please the Lord; who have done your duty in serving him as true "elder, pastor, shepherd, bishop, overseer, ruler, and steward of God," will be enough to compensate you throughout all eternity for the many hours, days, weeks, and years of persecution, criticism, and labor given to and for the glorious church of the Lord: "A crown of glory that fadeth not away!" No heart can understand; no mind can comprehend, but over there in the midst of the "sheep you have loved here on earth" you will be able to rejoice evermore with the "crown of glory that is yours" for service well done. May God bless and keep, by his providence, those faithful bishops among us who are striving to lead us in the way that will eventually take us all home to that land of eternal beauty, the land that is fairer than day, where we can all forget our sorrows here; be free from all sin and sinful men; and can love and worship God in peace for ever and ever and then forever.

I know that some Bible students make this apply entirely to the apostles and prophets, especially of the early part of the church but while I realize it must include them I do not adhere to the principle that it includes them only to the exclusion of all other leaders of the church. I, after much reading and studying of this passage, am forced to believe that in this group are also included those elders among them who were qualified teachers and leaders for to me this is used in a more liberal sense than just to include the apostles and prophets.

However may I add this comment just here: granting it does include only the apostles and prophets, instead of weakening the argument of the leadership of the elders, it would not give added strength to the thing I am striving to get the church to see, namely, that the elders today are over us for verse 17

of this same chapter certainly refers to the elders who at that time lived and ruled over them and all who in the future occupied such places. That means that my argument is sustained by them and would therefore have to be respected by the church.

To Faithful Elders,

If you have had a "Father's tenderness, a shepherd's care, a leader's courage which the cross can bear;

A ruler's care, a mother's watchful eye, a pilot's skill, the helm in storm to fly;

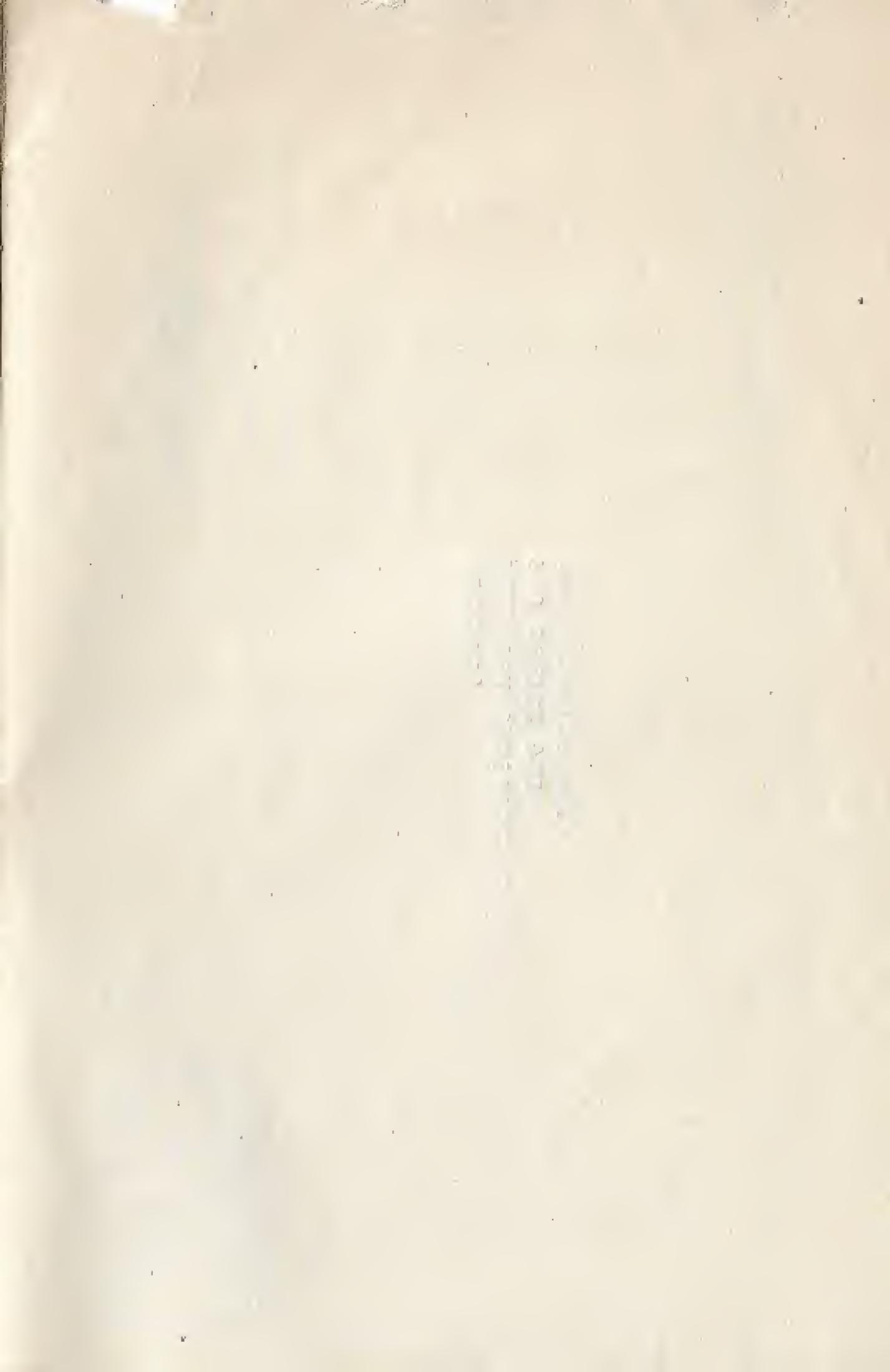
A fisherman's patience, a laborer's toil, a guide's dexterity to disentangle;

A prophet's inspiration from above, a teacher's knowledge and a Savior's love";

If all these you have, then you can say in that great day,

"All present and accounted for, Lord";

And to you he will give that "crown of glory that fadeth not away." What a load, the shepherd's care!



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